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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 001769

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STATE FOR NEA/ARP, INL/HSTC, INL/G/TIP (PATEL), DRL/IL
(ANZALDUA)

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SUBJECT: NEW MINISTER OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND LABOR ON TIP
AND LABOR ISSUES IN KUWAIT

REF: A. KUWAIT 1657 B. KUWAIT 1588

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, Alan G. Misenheimer, for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d)

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: On December 13, CDA met with MoSAL/Justice Minister Jamal Ahmed Al-Shihab. The Minister said that the GOK was appreciative of external pressure (up to a point) to resolve TIP issues and promised to partner with the Embassy to make further progress on TIP. Minister Al-Shihab was optimistic that current public sector pay raise disputes would be resolved by the GOK in February after the release of the World Bank study on the matter and remarked that the public respects the government when the government takes a firm position. He also stressed the importance of raising understanding between charitable organizations and the USG when it comes to terrorist finance, and wants the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor to act as a bridge for dialogue between the two parties. END SUMMARY.

GOK GRATEFUL FOR EXTERNAL PRESSURE ON TIP

¶12. (C) On December 13, CDA, accompanied by Econoff and Poloff, paid a visit to the newly (October 2007) appointed Minister of Social Affairs and Labor and Justice Jamal Al-Shihab. Minister Al-Shihab began the discussion about combating trafficking in persons (TIP) by saying that Kuwait is "happy to be monitored" for TIP violations and welcomed international pressure to increase efforts to combat TIP as long as this pressure did not go so far as to publicly embarrass Kuwait. He remarked that with regard to human rights issues, developing societies need to be monitored and that the GOK will be a good partner on this issue. Minister Al-Shihab stated that the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor (MoSAL) plans to work hard in partnership with the Embassy to establish a permanent shelter for domestic workers and push through the drafted anti-TIP legislation. The Minister commented that combating TIP and resolving related issues must be part of Kuwait's broader economic plan in terms of reforming the labor market. Al-Shihab concluded that all parts of society must work together to combat TIP and that he believes awareness about the issue is increasing. He pointed out that the Islamists are raising this as a moral issue and it is being spoken about in Friday sermons at mosques. He added that using moral pressure is an easy way to reach people and increase awareness about TIP. Al-Shihab said that many newly wealthy Kuwaitis needed to be educated on how to treat domestic servants.

LABOR ISSUES: "PEOPLE LIKE IT WHEN THE GOVERNMENT IS TOUGH"

¶13. (C) Minister Al-Shihab was optimistic that current demands for public sector pay raises and labor strikes would

be resolved in February with the release of a study being conducted by the World Bank (at the request of the GOK). The Minister said that the GOK was trying to change the attitude of the population so that they do not "rely on the government for everything." He explained that it was important for the GOK to be tough and not give in to demands everytime there is a strike. He opined that the money itself, which the GOK can readily afford, was not the issue, but the GOK needed to consider the long-term productivity of the Kuwait labor force and consult with other Gulf countries on their labor practices rather than making any precipitous decisions. He stated that striking laborers were a concern and not something the GOK wanted to see become a trend, adding that "people like it when the government is tough." (NOTE: A number of fields within the public sector, including aviation and health care, were disrupted by inconsistently applied pay increases for certain groups within the public sector and not others (Ref. A). On November 19, workers from the Civil Aviation Authority went on strike for approximately two-hours disrupting some service to and from Kuwait's international airport. The GOK has requested an assessment by the World Bank in order to establish a balanced wage increase for the entire public sector. END NOTE.)

TERRORIST FINANCING

¶4. (C) CDA commended MoSAL's efforts to monitor and control charitable contributions during Ramadan and asked the Minister what more could be done on this front. Minister Al-Shihab responded that MoSAL wants to be a bridge between the charitable organizations and the USG to enhance dialogue about terrorist finance (Ref. B). The Minister remarked that many of the charities feel that the USG is "against them" and

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that MoSAL wanted to serve in a capacity to increase awareness and transparency on the issue of charitable giving.

PLEASE PROVIDE ARABIC SPEAKERS FOR IPR TRAINING

¶5. (U) CDA briefed the Minister on upcoming training opportunities for Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) enforcement and said that he hoped there would be good GOK participation. Minister Al-Shihab asserted the importance of having Arabic speakers conduct the training. He asked that the USG provide the training in Arabic to ensure success.

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